

THE SECRET SPOT

NO. 780

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*"Their spot is not the spot of His children."
Deuteronomy 32:5.*

THERE are frequently great difficulties in identifying the persons of men, even when they have been distinctly seen. Our police courts have given us, during the last few weeks, most serious evidence that men may be utterly deceived as to the identity of individuals. They may be prepared, and honestly I believe, to take an oath that such-and-such a person is the man whom they saw discharging firearms or throwing stones, and yet that person may have been many miles away. A slight change of dress, another color in the necktie, or a different shape of the hat, or some trifling alteration of the hair, may throw a witness entirely off his guard. It was said to be almost dangerous for persons of a certain height, and of a certain color of hair, to be passing the police courts lest they should be arrested, and marched in with others to be identified by witnesses who were extremely anxious to identify somebody or other. This fact seems very clearly established, that the judgment of men, even with regard to the identity of their fellow creatures, is very far from being infallible.

Turning to the moral universe, identity there is far more difficult to be made out, for both the moral and religious world swarm with pretenders. You cannot know for certain who among your acquaintances is a Christian and who is not. This is known to God, and may be revealed to each man for himself; but deception is so easy, and is nowadays practiced in so masterly a manner, that I know it is difficult to know a son of God from a son of Belial; you may sit down and commune with an apostle, and find he is a Judas; you may walk side by side with one who seemed to be a Simon Peter, and prove him to be a Simon Magus; yes, what is worse, you may be deceived about yourself, and whereas you may have thought your body to be a temple of the Holy Spirit, you may suddenly discover it to have been made a den of thieves. Yet this is a very important matter, for if men are not right, and cannot clear their consciences that they are right, they live in a state of perpetual unrest, never at any moment possessing safety. We ought to know—we should never be at peace till we do know—whether we are the children of God or not; and since the outward aspect so often deceives, and visible signs are not to be relied upon, it becomes imperative upon us that we should search deep, and look for signs that will not deceive us, prying into the very core and marrow of our being, till we have resolved the weighty question, whether we are the children of God or the heirs of wrath.

You see the text talks about certain secret *spots*. These are tokens in which men cannot so readily deceive as to their identity. The mother will be able to tell whether this is her child or not by the spot which is known to none but herself. The pretender may be very like her child—the voice may be the voice of Jacob, and the hands may not be dissimilar, and he may be able to relate many things concerning his youth which it would seem that none but the real child could know; but the mother remembers that there was a secret spot, and if that is not there, she turns the pretender aside—but if she discovers that private token, she knows the claimant to be her child. I want, this morning, for us to remember that there are secret marks upon every Christian, and if we have not the spot of God's child too, it will little avail us how fairly in our outward garb and manner we may conform ourselves to the members of the heavenly family.

We have before us a whole host of persons who profess to be the children of the Most High. They are exceedingly confident because they come before us in *the garments* of God's people, but their robes do not deceive us, immediately we tell them that we cannot judge by the outward appearance; for a religious profession is very easily procured: the very brightest colors may be flaunted, and a man's gar-

ments may be outwardly spotless and fair to the eye, and yet for all that he may be the basest of pretenders. None wash their hands more often than the Pharisees, and yet they are sepulchers full of rottenness; none say longer prayers than the Scribes, and yet none more ready to devour widows' houses. The outward garb of religion is no criterion by which to judge a man in an age as full of deception as the present, which has been fitly called the era of shams. If a devout exterior will not satisfy us, these professors address us in *the language of piety*; they use the holy speech which is thought decorous among the people of God; but we straightway tell them that albeit if we lived with them, we have no doubt their speech would betray them, when the old brogue of Babylon would come out unawares, yet still their outward public speech can be no rule of judgment to us, for those often talk loudest who know least. The bell rings men to Church, but says no prayers itself: there may be the sign of the angel hanging over the inn door, but the devil may be the landlord within. That sepulcher which is most whitewashed may be full of dead men's bones. Should both garb and language fail to convince us, those who would make a fair show in the flesh, point us to *their actions*, and "In this" they say, "surely we cannot deceive, for 'by their fruits you shall know them.'" We confess that it is even so, we can only judge men by their fruits, and we are not allowed by God's word to judge any further; but men must judge themselves other than by merely outward acts—they must examine their motives and the design and scope by which those acts were dictated and directed, for otherwise they may only possess that superficial morality which is deceptive, because it springs not from the depths of the heart, but is a mere stagnant pool, and not the clear crystal living water welling up from the inmost soul of the man. Men may be externally washed, but not internally quickened; they may be covered with the flowers of righteousness, but those flowers may have no root, and by-and-by may wither away because the heart is not right in the sight of God. sirs, we will not be content, this morning, with examining your clothes, nor listening to your speech, nor even with touching your hands, for all these signs may deceive *you*, if they do not deceive us. We ask you to come with us into the stripping room, and let us search for the spots, the secret spots, without which you cannot know to a certainty that you are the true children of the living God!

This morning, as we may be helped by God the Holy Spirit, in solemn downright earnest we mean if we can, first of all, *to take you to the examination of the secret spots*; secondly, *to make a declaration from God's word of what the true spot is*; thirdly, *to discriminate among men as to those public and defiling spots which, alas, are to be found in all of us*; and, then, fourthly, *an exhortation upon the whole subject*.

I. First, then, at the mention of private spots which are to be the insignia of the regenerate, there are thousands who say, "We do not shirk that examination. Truly the signs of saints are in us also! Are others Israelites? So are we. We bear in our bodies the marks of the Lord Jesus—we challenge an investigation." Be it so, then! LET US COMMENCE A MINUTE EXAMINATION.

I am not now to deal with anything that is public. We are not speaking now about actions or words, but concerning those secret things which men have judged to be infallible marks of their being saved.

Here is a friend before us, and as he lays bare his heart, he indicates to us the spot which he thinks proclaims him to be a child of God. I will describe it. This man has embraced *sound doctrine*; he has managed by some means to become thoroughly Calvinistic; he holds the doctrine of election in all its length and breadth; he would fight to the last moment of life for any one of the five points of the Calvinistic confession. You cannot find a man more determinedly orthodox; he abhors all teaching which he judges to be uncertain in its soundness; and within his heart he believes that he is therefore saved. "Surely," whispers his vain heart, "surely a man with such a sound creed cannot be cast into hell!" He delights to hear the preacher deal a heavy blow at Arminians, or Ritualists, or any other people who differ from him, because he feels then that the privilege which he has monopolized in his own conceit is thus defended and preserved from all intruders. "Ah," he says, "I am saved; I have received the truth of God, and hold it with all my might." Everywhere he goes, his whole talk is of his favorite Shibboleth, "The truth! The truth! The truth!" Not that the aforesaid truth has ever renewed his nature; not that it has ever changed his moral character; not that it has at all made him a better husband or a kinder father; not that it influences him in trade; not that you could perceive any sanctifying effect proceeding from his creed if you lived with him; but still this is it, orthodoxy, thorough orthodoxy, holding the truth of God and holding it firmly too, and denouncing all others, this is his balm of Gilead to heal all disease, this is his

crown of rejoicing in life, and his passport to the skies. Now, sir, we do not hesitate to say concerning you, although you will not be pleased with us for it, that your spot is not the spot of the children of God. It is a good thing to be sound in the faith, but *that virtue* may belong to the vilest sinner out of hell. There have been some men who have been orthodox to the core, and yet they have been detestable hypocrites, and not one atom better, as their outward life has shown. No form of doctrine, however Scriptural, can ever save the soul if it is only received by the head, and does not work in its mighty energy upon the heart. “You must be born-again,” are the Savior’s words; and unless you are born-again, your carnal nature may hold the truth of God in the letter without discerning its spirit; and while the truth shall be dishonored by being so held, you yourself shall not be benefited thereby.

But here is another waiting to be searched. He also believes that he has discovered in himself the spot of God’s child. It is this—not as common a spot, I believe, in this congregation as in some—a *knowledge of inward corruption*. “Ah,” says one, “I know that I am an heir of heaven, because I am aware of the sinfulness of my nature. I know my heart to be horribly depraved; I believe my nature to be detestable and vile, and sometimes I am the subject of frightful blasphemous thoughts, and have inclinations towards the most horrible iniquities. Surely I am a quickened child of God or I would not have so vivid a conviction of indwelling sin! I would not feel that I was as bad as I am if I had not been first of all quickened and awakened!” Now, believe me, there are thousands who are under the delusion that this spot is the spot of God’s children, but let me assure them very affectionately that it is no such thing. God’s children do have a sense of sin, they groan because of the body of this death, they daily lament the plague of their own heart, but a full persuasion of their own sinfulness may be found in *thousands* who are not God’s children. It is a preposterous assumption that for a man to know himself to be a sinner proves him to be a saint. Let me ask the physician whether a sense of sickness proves a man to be cured. Let me ask a drowning man whether a sense of sinking proves that he is rescued. Let me ask a bankrupt debtor whether a sense of being penniless proves that he is rich. You know better; common sense teaches you better! It is not a discovery of your sin that will save you, but hearty faith in the Savior; and if you have not gone further than a mere conviction of sin, which may be nothing but a legal conviction, and a natural alarm at the awful punishment of sin—if you have not gone further than mere alarm or remorse, you have not the spot which marks you out to be a child of God; you may be a Judas crying, “I have sinned,” and you may even hang yourself through terror of conscience, and be none the less, but rather all the more, a son of perdition! A cutting truth is this, but it must be told, lest any are misled.

I see before me at the door of the stripping room a third class of persons, who say, “Surely we have this spot, *for we are full of confidence that we are saved*; we believe that we are saved—firmly believe it. We are not among those sinful people who indulge in doubts and fears. We know that we are saved. We have known it for years, and we have never had a doubt about it. If ever a question is raised, ‘Do I love the Lord or not? Am I His or am I not?’ we throw the question out—we believe it to come from Satan to mar our peace, and spoil our comfort. We have long ago given up self-examination as an unnecessary disturbing of the peace of our spirits. We have made up our minds that we are saved, and it gives us great peace to believe that we are.” Yes; but, my hearers, such a spot is not the spot of God’s children, for after this fashion the foolish cry, “Peace, peace, where there is no peace.” Remember how easy it is to daub with untempered mortar, how readily you may build upon a sandy foundation, and how the superstructure may be run up with marvelous speed if you build with wood, hay, and stubble—you may make a much more fair show with perishable materials than if you waited till you had gold and silver, and precious stones, to slowly build the edifice. But remember that for you to believe that you are saved does not *prove* that you are saved: the poor lunatic in Bedlam believes himself to be a king, but no man acknowledges his sovereignty. Your undisturbed conscience may be no evidence of divine grace, but rather a token of reprobation, for there are some who have received a strong delusion to believe a lie, that they may be damned. They are fooled by Satan into the delusion that they are the people of God, whereas they are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity. Hope is our anchor, but what is the use of an anchor if it has nothing to lay hold upon? “I hope,” said one, when he heard of his neighbor’s death, “I hope he is all right.” And yet he knew that he died drunk. Now, if that man had said, “I wish that there may have been found a way by which it is possible for him to be saved,” I could under-

stand it, but to say “I hope,” where there was no ground and foundation for hope, was to speak as the foolish speak. You and I ought not to have a hope which will not bear the test. Oh, instead of shirking self-examination, practice it daily; ask for the strong wind from the wilderness to come and smite the four corners of your house, for if it is built upon a rock it will not fall; but, oh, if it is but a sand-built house, it will be far better that it should come down now, than that you should dwell in it for a while with groundless comfort, and find it fall about your ears to all eternity. No, the self-confident assumption that you are saved is not the spot of God’s children.

Frequently I meet with others who will say, “We certainly have the private mark of gracious souls, for *we are so happy*; we have such happy feelings when we are worshipping God; we feel so delighted with going up to the assemblies of God’s people. Sometimes at the prayer meeting we get so happy and excited we hardly know what to do, and when we sing those delightful revival tunes, we feel so exceedingly blessed.” Now this may or may not be from the Spirit of God. God’s children are made glad in the House of prayer, but remember, others are made glad besides God’s children, for doubtless there have been thousands who have received the word with joy, as our Savior tells us, who are like the seed sown on stony ground, which sprang up rapidly, because it had no depth of earth, but afterwards when the sun had risen, it withered away. Beware of being stony-ground hearers, and above all, let me say to you, beware of placing the slightest dependence upon your attitude and feelings. The most desponding feelings do not prove that your soul is in peril, for some of those who before God were surest of heaven, have been the least assured of it in their own feelings. The highest and most rapturous feelings of delight do not prove us to be the children of God, for some have had no fear in their death, and their strength has been firm; they have not been in trouble as other men, neither have they been plagued like other men, and yet for all that their end has been destruction. Moab was settled upon his lees, and was not emptied from vessel to vessel, but how terrible was his end! Never, therefore, put any dependence upon your attitude and feelings—let them be what they may; go deeper than the froth of feeling, search in the depths of principle for the priceless pearl of infallible evidence. This spot is not the spot of God’s children.

There are others and many, too, who will say, “But at least we can bring a mark which is not to be counterfeited, a sure and certain mark of conversion: there was a happy day when we experienced most extraordinary things.” As soon as some people of an excitable temperament begin to narrate their treasured story of marvels, you may anticipate that they are going to tell you that they heard a voice, or saw a vision, or were impressed with this, or saw that; all which may be true or may be imagination, according to the truthfulness and common sense of the speaker. And all this may have a connection with their being saved, for there is no doubt that many have been impressed in dreams, and I will even venture to say by visions and voices. Many men’s first religious thoughts have been awakened in them by strange impressions; and, therefore, these things are not to be laughed at; whether they are freaks of the imagination or not I care not, as long as men’s minds are awakened, the mode matters but little. But if anybody shall say that the experience of singular impressions, or remarkable emotions proves men to be believers, I must most gravely and solemnly disagree, for alas, there have been thousands who profess to have seen angels who are now with devils, and I do not doubt there are tens of thousands who have fought with devils who are now with angels of light! It is not what you see with these eyes, nor hear with these ears, nor feel with flesh and blood; our religion is spiritual, and is spiritually discerned—not a thing of rhapsody, excitement, and imagination, but a matter of sober thought and meditation; and if you have not something more than a mere day or night of singularities to look back upon, your evidences of divine grace are worthless. I delight to look back upon the day when I was converted to God. Many of you do, and I hope you always will look back upon that happy hour with pleasure when you first turned to the Lord. But I have known what it is to feel, that if I had no reason to believe that I was saved except the remembrance what I felt that day, I should have no solid ground at all. The fact is, brothers and sisters, the spot of God’s children is not a thing of yesterday, but an abiding and continual token. The true spot is far more than any memory of the past, as I shall show you, and if you have not *that*, you may have all that you can imagine or invent, but God will repudiate you at the last, saying, “I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.”

II. We now come to the second head. WHAT IS THE TRUE SECRET SPOT WHICH INFALLIBLY IDENTIFIES THE CHILD OF GOD?

Beloved, it were vain presumption, blasphemous arrogance, for me to set myself up as able to tell you this of my own judgment; but God's word reveals it to us, and therefore we may tread surely where we have revelation to be our guide. Now, we are told in the gospel according to John, concerning our Lord—"As many as received Him, to them gave He power [or privilege] to become the sons of God, even to them who believe on His name." Here it is, then, if I have received Christ Jesus into my heart, then I am a child of God. That reception is described in the second clause as a believing on the name of Jesus Christ. If, then, I believe on Jesus Christ's name—that is, simply from my heart trust myself with the crucified, but now exalted, Redeemer, I am a member of the family of the Most High. Whatever else I may not have, if I have this, I have the privilege to become a child of God; but if I have not this, I may have all the other spots I have been speaking of, this morning, which may seem to some to be very great beauty spots, but they are not the spots of the children of God. To strengthen the text we have already given you, let us remind you of another: "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." That is, whoever takes Jesus to be to him his anointed Priest, anointed to offer sacrifice of atonement for him, such a soul is born of God. He who takes this man or that to be his priest, or sets up to offer sacrifice for himself is no child of God, be he what he may; but he who takes the Most High Lord, once slain, but now ever living, to be an anointed Priest unto him, may conclude at once that he has the spot of God's child upon him. Our Lord Jesus puts it in another way. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." Here is the matter in a nutshell! Christ appears as a Shepherd to His own sheep, not to others. As soon as He appears, His own sheep perceive Him; they trust Him; they are prepared to follow Him; He knows them, and they know Him—there is a mutual knowledge; He guides them, and they follow Him—there is a constant connection between them. If to put this truth of God positively is not enough, let me remind you how our Savior puts it negatively. When the Jews were rioting around Him, instead of listening to His earnest voice, He turned to them and said, "You believe not, because you are not of My sheep, as I said unto you." As much as to say, it is because I have not chosen you, and My divine grace has never looked upon you, it is because the divine life has never throbbed in your bosoms, that you do not believe on Me; for if you had the life of God, and were God's children, you would accept Me at once. This is the one mark, the sure mark, the *only* infallible mark—a hearty faith in the appointed Redeemer!

My dear friends, I doubt not many will say, "That is very simple." My reply is, "Glory be to God, it is simple!" The more simple the plan of salvation, the more evidently it is of God. Are we not told that Babylon, the mother of harlots, has written upon her brow, "Mystery"?—mystery is the mark of the Roman Catholic faith, and the sure symbol of Antichrist. That gospel which is so plain that he who runs may read it, that the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein, this gospel which is preached unto the poor, this gospel which may be understood even by a child, this is the gospel, the glorious gospel of the blessed God which is committed to our trust. What says the apostle? "Seeing then," he says, "that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech." Here is the root of the matter, and if you trust Jesus Christ with all your heart, if you rely upon Him to save you, and if your reliance is such that it touches your heart, and makes you love the man who shed great drops of blood for you, if your faith is such that it operates upon your moral character, compelling you no longer to be an enemy to your good and generous God, then you are saved, for you have the spot of God's child! But "without faith it is impossible to please God." I tell you solemnly that all your generosity, your almsgiving, your Sabbath keeping, your repentance, your prayers, your tears, are all are nothing without faith in Christ! Go heap them up till they make a pyramid as great as that which casts its mighty shadow far down the Libyan Desert, but they are as nothing, things of nothing.

All human excellences, without *faith*, will fly as chaff before the wind when the hour of trial shall come; if trusted in, they are as smoke in the nostrils of the Most High, because they rival the cross of Christ. Go humbly to the cross, look up to Him who suffered there, rely on Him and you shall live; but gad you about as you may to this shrine and to that, and scourge yourselves and deny yourselves this and that, and practice all the austerities you please, you shall be further from God than at the first if you despise the salvation of Jesus Christ. Going about to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness which is of God by faith, and therefore their spot is not the

spot of God's children. But coming simply to Jesus, and resting alone in Him, they have glorified God, and they are themselves proved to be the children of the Most High.

III. I shall now, in the third place, turn to another view of the subject which concerns THE DISCRIMINATION OF DEFILING SPOTS.

The term "spot" as used in the text, will not be read usually as we have read it this morning. It will, no doubt, to most readers suggest the idea of sin, and very properly so—then the text would run thus: the sin of the people mentioned here is not the sin of God's people. There is a difference between their guilt and the offenses of the Lord's chosen. This brings me to the point—there is a discrimination to be made, even as to sinful spots. When God's children are mired and spattered with filth, still there is a difference between them and others. An unhappy thing it is, we cannot mourn too much over it, that evil remains even in the hearts of the regenerate, and that the much fine gold sometimes becomes dim and the glory departs. God's people are a holy people, but they are not a perfect people. They aspire after perfection, but they have not yet attained it. Sometimes, alas, they fall! We believe they never fall finally or totally, but they often fall sorrowfully and foully. But yet the ungodly may not take comfort from the sins of God's people, for *their* spots are not the spots of God's children.

Let us very briefly—we cannot enter into the subject in full this morning—show that there is a difference between the sin of God's people and the sin of others. God forbid that you should imagine that I wish to excuse the sins of believers! In some views, when a believer sins, his sin is worse than that of other men, because he offends against greater light and knowledge; he revolts against greater love and mercy; he flies in the teeth of his profession; he does despite, in a measure, to the cross of Christ, and he brings grievous dishonor upon the name of Jesus whom he professes to serve. Believers cannot sin cheaply. The very least speck on a Christian is more plainly seen than the foulest blot on the ungodly, just as a white dress shows the dirt the sooner. The cleaner the paper, the sooner is the mark perceived; but if the paper is black, there may be many marks and stains, and yet they may not be perceptible. God forbid that we should palliate, excuse, or extenuate the faults of God's people. Sin is a horrible thing, and it is above all things detestable when it lurks in a child of God; yet the sins of God's people do differ from the sins of other men in many important respects; they do not sin with deliberation, and with cool determination, meaning to sin, and sinning for its own sake. The ungodly person knows a thing to be wrong, and therefore does it; he plans it upon his bed; he takes counsel with himself when he shall enjoy this pleasure or indulge that lust, knowing at the same time that the pleasure is evil, and the lust is iniquity. The believer possibly falls into the same sin as the unbeliever, yet not through evil aforethought, but through force of a strong and violent temptation. Had he paused awhile, he would have despised the evil, and turned from it with hatred; but there came upon him a sudden a rush of diabolical power, and he seemed borne away by it, to his own intense grief—a grief which makes him go with broken bones for many a year afterwards. We do not sin willfully nor deliberately; we do not love the way of transgression—blessed be God, we could not run in it with all our heart, for if we saw the evil distinctly before us as such, our spirit in calm consideration would recoil from the mere shadow of it. The child of God does not sin with the pleasure and gusto of other men. When the sheep stumbles, as it may do, into the mire, it is up again and on; but if the swine should fall there, it rolls over, and wallows as in its element. A sinner in his sins is a bird in the air, but the believer in sin is like the fish that leaps for a while into the air, but must be back again or die. Sin cannot be satisfactory to an immortal spirit regenerated by the Holy Spirit, it is poison to it; very soon that poison must be thrown out of the system, for the living child of God cannot endure sin to fester within him. If you sin, you "have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous": but if you sin and love sin, then you are the servant of sin, and not a child of God.

Again, the child of God cannot look back upon sin with any kind of complacency. The ungodly man has this spot, that after the sin he even boasts of it; he will tell others that he enjoyed himself greatly in his wicked sport, and he will gloat over its sweetness, turning the morsel over and over, and rolling it under his tongue like an epicure delighting in a dainty dish. "Ah," he says, "how sweet it is!" As for its being contrary to God, it makes it all the sweeter to him, or else, "God is not in all his thoughts." But no man or woman of God ever sins without smarting. Very soon conscience wakes, and, as the word of God puts it, "David's heart smote him." It is a horrible knock that the heart gives when it begins to smite. All the men in the world may say what they please as long as my heart does not speak against me;

but when conscience says, “It is true; you did it, and you have played the fool,” then a Christian hangs his head and retires into the shades to hide himself for a while, for he is ashamed. If you can sin and not weep over it, you are an heir of hell. If you can go into sin, and afterwards feel satisfied to have done so, you are on the road to destruction! If there are no pricks of conscience, no inward torments, no bleeding wounds; if you have no throbs and heaves of a bosom that cannot rest; if your soul never feels filled with wormwood and gall when you know you have done evil, you are no child of God; but if your sins plague you, and your soul abhors them, and takes them with weeping to the cross of Jesus, then the sins which you hate shall never destroy you; that which you loathe shall not be brought against you to condemn you; this shall be set down to the account of your Surety, and not to you, seeing that He was delivered for your offenses, and is raised again for your justification.

The child of God also has this difference in his spots from others—when he knows the spot, and is led to repent of it—it makes him more careful in the future, especially in that respect in which he has erred. Have you not seen him afraid to put one foot before another for fear he should do wrong? He had a fall the other day, and he goes very tenderly, very softly. He is almost afraid to open his mouth now, because he spoke so unadvisedly the other day, and his prayer is, “Lord, open my lips! I dare not open them.” He used to be very fast and confident, but notice him now; he has a broken spirit, and speaks with bated breath. He does not hold his head up loftily as he used to do; he thanks God that he is forgiven, feels that he has peace, and he blesses God for it; but he is jealous of himself with holy jealousy. You will not find him mingling with that company which led him astray; he is a burnt child, and dreads the fire. You will see him much more precise with himself than he used to be. He used to be precise with other men and lax with himself; now it is different—he can make excuses for others, but he makes none for himself. His heart now pants to be eminent for that very grace in which he failed, and he gives particular attention to keep watch and ward over that part of the wall through which the invader found entrance.

But I need not enlarge. You who are the children of God must have noticed a difference between your sins now and your sins as they once were; and you cannot but observe, day by day, if you look within, that divine grace has made a change even in those sins in which our evil nature exercises most dominion. But, beloved, the best thing we can do is to keep as far away from evil as possible. We have no right to say, “I may be a child of God, and yet do so-and-so.” No! The heir of heaven does not desire to approach the appearance of evil. I am much afraid for some of you who are asking, “Is this wrong, and that wrong?” *Do nothing about which you have need to ask a question!* Be quite sure about it, or leave it alone. Know you not that inspired word, “Whatever is not of *faith* is sin”—that is, whatever you cannot do with the confidence that you are doing right, is sin to you? Though the deed may be right to other people, if you have any doubt about it yourself, it is evil to you. God grant, dear friends, that we may not be “conformed to the world,” but be “transformed by the renewing of our minds.” If I knew that there was a leper colony anywhere in the country, I do not think I would want to build my house near it; I would not send for the physician and say, “sir, how far do you think the effect of pestilence might spread? I would like to get as near as I could without actually catching the disease.” “No, no!” you say, “if there is a plot of land to be bought where there is no disease in the neighborhood, there let my tent be pitched. It is best to dwell far off from evil.” O may God separate us from evil in this world, as we hope to be separated from it in the world to come! There will be a great gulf fixed between it and us in the next world, may there be a wide demarcation now.

IV. My close is AN EXHORTATION, an exhortation to myself and to you to make sure work for eternity, and to make it clear to your own consciences that you are, indeed, the children of God.

Ah, my dear hearers, it is not possible for me to be earnest enough in this matter! I wish I had a tongue like the pen of a ready writer that I might speak to you with power this morning. Yet, perhaps, feebleness of words may give but the greater power in spirit if God the Holy Spirit will press upon the conscience of you all the need and duty of an earnest heart-searching self-examination. A famous case is now pending, in which a person claims to be the son of a deceased baronet. Whether he is or not I suppose will, before long, be decided by the highest authorities; meanwhile the case is pending, a very weighty case for him, for upon the decision will hang his possession or non-possession of vast estates and enormous property. Now, in your case you, many of you, profess to be the children of God, and

heaven hangs upon the question of the truthfulness of your profession. Heaven! No, there is a dread alternative, heaven or hell must hang upon the truth or the falsehood of your profession: yes, moreover about those two things there is flung a golden chain of eternity, making each of them weightier than they otherwise would be. A child of God! Then your portion is eternal life! An heir of wrath, even as others! Then your heritage will be eternal death! For a moment, conceive that you are passing into the next world. What will be the trepidation of your spirit if it is then a matter of question? With what alarm will you await the decisive ordeal? “Shall I ascend on wings of joy up to the realms where angels dwell, or must I sink with devils as the companions of my woe, to dwell forever in hell?” What horror to have that question still unanswered! Is it uncertain now, my hearer, is it uncertain now, whether you are a child of God or not? Is it uncertain whether your spot is the spot of God’s children? Then let not an hour pass over your head till you have said, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” Trifle not here, I plead with you! If you must trifle anywhere, let it be about some secondary matter; your health, if you will, or the title deeds of your estates; but your souls, your never-dying souls, and their eternal destinies, I beseech you be in earnest here, for you will be in earnest soon, earnestly praising God in heaven, or earnestly moaning out your never-ending sorrow in the pit of hell where hope can never come. God grant us wisdom, then, since so much hangs upon it, not to play the fool by taking things at second hand, but to search to the very roots and foundations of the matter to know whether we are saved or not.

This duty is much more easy to explain than to enforce, and more easy to enforce than to practice. We all shun it. The preacher naturally says to himself, “Have you not preached to others? You may surely excuse yourself.” The old member of the church who has long maintained an honorable outward profession, whispers to himself, or Satan whispers to him, “You are an old experienced Christian, why need you go back to the beginning and do your first works?” The young professor in the heyday of his zeal, says within himself, “I know that it is right with me.” But ah, I pray you remember, he who takes things too quickly as being what he desires them to be, will be deceived in the end. “The heart is deceitful above all things,” says the prophet, “and desperately wicked,” and will you not believe it? Examine it and cross-examine it, for it is a lying witness. Believe it to be dishonest and try to prove it so, and if haply you should be unable, then what a comfort to you! But to believe your heart to be honest and sound, why this is to begin where the *fool* does, at the wrong end of the chapter! Suspect yourself, and go to Christ this morning as a sinner. Doubt yourself, and go to Jesus. *Never doubt Him!* Confess yourself now to be undone and ruined if it is so, but go to Him who is *still* the Savior, able to save to the uttermost. Still guilty, still lost, still defiled, go still to the “fountain filled with blood”: go, still, to the open-handed Savior, and ask Him to press you to His bosom and to save you now. This is the quick way, the sure way, the blessed way of finding out the secret spot—to go at once to Christ. If I never came before, O bleeding Savior, now I come, and if I have often come and put my trust in You, I come again—accept a guilty sinner who casts himself alone on You, and save him for Your mercy’s sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—HEBREWS 4.

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